

March 9th, 2017

The Honorable Ajit Pai, Chairman
The Honorable Mignon Clyburn, Commissioner
The Honorable Michael O’Rielly, Commissioner
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, D.C. 20554

Re: *Procedures for Commission Review of State Opt-Out Requests from the FirstNet Radio Access Network*; PS Docket No. 16-269
Implementing Public Safety Broadband Provisions of the Middle Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act of 2012; PS Docket No. 12-94
Implementing a Nationwide, Broadband, Interoperable Public Safety Network in the 700 MHz Band; PS Docket No. 06-229

Dear Chairman Pai and Commissioners Clyburn and O’Rielly:

Wireless Partners, LLC designs, builds, owns and operates advanced 4G LTE voice (VoLTE) and broadband data wireless networks focused in unserved and underserved rural markets, and is a trusted, proven provider of carrier-grade wireless telecommunication solutions. Wireless Partners has been working with state authorities to assist them in evaluating the option provided in the 2012 Spectrum Act to “opt out” of the First Responder Network Authority (“FirstNet”) radio access network. I write to you regarding the pending Federal Communications Commission (“Commission”) proceeding to adopt procedures that will implement the Commission’s obligation to review state opt-out requests to ensure that state networks will be interoperable with FirstNet.

As you know, the process that FirstNet established to hire a network partner has been bogged down in litigation for many months, with FirstNet unable as yet to award that contract. This delay has significantly set back the FirstNet effort, more than five years after Congress mandated a nationwide public safety broadband network to address the urgent and longstanding problems in public safety communications, which were laid bare on 9/11 and confirmed in a variety of emergencies and national disasters since then. State authorities are understandably eager to provide state-of-the-art public safety communications to their residents, and given the connectivity challenges in many areas of the country, many may conclude that a more customized, statewide network would serve their needs better than the nationwide FirstNet network. They are committed to fulfilling their interoperability obligations, and want to work cooperatively with the Commission on a smooth review process for opt-out requests.

I was pleased that, in his recent testimony before the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, Chairman Pai stated that each opt-out state “should have a full and fair opportunity” to present its interoperability plans and expressed the view that they should be able to amend pending applications in consultation with the Commission. To that end, I urge the Commission to adopt procedures that will (1) allow states to file opt-out requests with the Commission as soon as is practicable, and (2) give states the flexibility to amend their requests and otherwise adjust their interoperability showings as needed to respond to changes in technology and/or FirstNet compatibility requirements, or to address any issues the Commission may raise, and (3) enable states, once approved, to begin deployments immediately without regard to the timing of FirstNet deployment.

States choosing to opt out of FirstNet must commit that their networks will be interoperable with the FirstNet nationwide system, and the Commission will of course require that. But there is no reason for the Commission to hold opt-out states to a “one and done” approach, or otherwise deny them the opportunity to amend their initial submissions if needed in order to gain Commission approval.

Wireless Partners applauds the Commission for its efforts in ensuring that America’s first responders have access to state-of-the-art public safety communications technologies. Many state authorities are well-equipped to hit the ground running in crafting their own interoperable statewide plans, and the Commission’s review procedures should facilitate this process.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Parsloe', written over a horizontal line.

Robert J. Parsloe
President & Chief Executive Officer